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Pls. 25-27 SWĀT.WOODEN MOSQUES (18th-20th cent. A.D.)

The idea of a research project devoted to the mosques and the wooden decoration in Swāt, an extremely interesting and practically unknown chapter of Islamic art, came in 1959 at the beginning of the Archaeological Mission, with a first somewhat haphazard photographic collection.

The first systematic investigation was promoted in the late sixties with a campaign of drawing and photographic documentation by the architects Prof. G. Zander and Dr L. Mariani. After a long interruption, work was resumed in 1980.

This investigation has become far more urgent due to the fact that such an important artistic and cultural patrimony is seriously endangered by the pressure of large-scale economic developments and by social change. Several mosques included in a first list compiled in 1968 have in fact been destroyed, and common buildings made of concrete and covered with corrugated-iron roofs have taken their place, causing the loss by destruction, which is often total, of the wonderful decoration in carved wood, or in few "lucky" occasions disposed of as fragments in the antiquarian market.

We have knowledge so far of just one case in which imposing architectonical decoration was almost integrally re-used in the reconstruction of a mosque, the famous mosque of Kalām, which at one time was undoubtedly among the most imposing and evocative ones.

On the other hand, only our drawings and the photographs taken in 1970 remain of the mosque of Utrōt.

If carved wood decorations of Swāt had attracted the interest of an expert of such importance as Sir Aurel Stein about sixty years ago and occasionally of other scholars (and we are bound not to forget that National College of Art in Lahore organized in 1961 a documentary exhibition on Folk Art in Swāt), on the other hand it is true that the architectonical complexes as such are practically unknown, notwithstanding their intrinsic beauty and the conspicuous series of questions that they raise.

The fact that we are talking of monuments which are not very old (it is difficult to verify for them a dating prior to a century and a half), obviously is not important.

Moreover bear in mind that in Swāt the last craftsmen who carved the wood disappeared about fifteen years ago. Neither is the situation greatly different in other valleys well-known at one time for the excellence of their carved wood production, as for instance



Darel and Tangīr, on which Prof. K. Jettmar focussed his attention twenty years ago.

So far the Mission has until now inventoried 75 mosques in the low Swāt and in Kōhistān, collecting a remarkable documentation consisting of about 300 drawings including plans, sections, axonometries, sketches and structural and decoration details, and over 8,000 photographs.

There are in Swāt two fundamental types of mosque, roughly corresponding to the two ethnic and cultural areas in which Swat might be divided: the one prevalently inhabited by the Pukhtun population down in the plain southwards of Bahrain, and the Kōhistān in the north, inhabited by the Dardic population. We could talk of lowland and highland types.

The first type is closely related to the "Arab" canonical typology, however with notable and particular interpretations. It is characterized by a "wide" prayer hall with a flat roof supported by two series of pillars parallel to the *qibla* wall. This prayer hall, originally totally or partially without windows, was always furnished with at least one large pit fireplace, and successively more and more frequently stoves obtained from petrol drums took its place.

The winter hall is preceded by a "deep" verandah, furnished with a *mubrāb*, which serves as summer prayer hall. The verandah terminates in a porch on the northern side the courtyard. The other two sides of the courtyard are, or at least were, generally left open. The tendency towards its enclosure within porch wings, one of which including the ablution zone, is in fact a recent custom; as even more recent is the insertion of a minaret.

The type with a wide hall can also occasionally be found in the Kōhistān region of Swāt, in those inhabited sites which stand on main trading routes and have a large commercial occupation as, for instance, at Bahrain (Branial).

In the architectural distribution of the supports, often bulbous columns, and in general in the decoration, a suggestion of the decorative patterns of the late Moghul and/or Central Asian architecture is strong.

The highland type of mosque, the articulation of which is conditioned by the nature of the ground as well as by the compulsory orientation of the *qibla*, shows a greater autonomy and derives its plan from the traditional local type of house.

It generally consists of a winter prayer hall almost square in plan, its roof being supported by a single and often colossal central pillar. As a rule the hall contains a large pit fireplace.

The winter prayer hall is preceded by a verandah consisting almost always of a porch built onto one of the short sides of the prayer hall and which includes the ablution zone.

A typical element of the mosques is the channel which brings running water to the ablution basins, the arrangements of which are always functionally differentiated.

Especially in the highland area, a blacksmith's workshop is very frequently situated by the side of the mosque.

The enclosure walls of the mosques are, as a rule, now made of stone mixed with wood which constitutes a sort of cage, while in the highland types often the walls too are entirely made of wood, cut in huge panels. Also pillars and roofs are made of wood.

The carved wood decoration is mainly concentrated on the pillars and the bracketed capitals which are generally richly voluted, with many variant patterns.

Of carved wood is also the mosque's furniture consisting of the *minbar*, lecterns for the Koran and the *mibrābs*. The latter are mobile panels which are placed against the *qibla* wall. The permanent niche-type *mibrāb* appears to be a relatively recent innovation.

Quite frequently in the mosques in the lowland and on the plain, there is rich imaginative stucco decoration generally adorning the *mibrābs*, the Koran-holder niches and the winter-hall wall looking out onto the courtyard, one of the most remarkable examples of which is in the Kūz Jumāt of Madiyān.

#### Pl. 25

1. Kalām, wooden mosque. Front; in the foreground, the ablution basins.  
(Neg. no. Dep. CS 12621 - GS 1968)
2. Piya, wooden mosque. Verandah.  
(Neg. no. Dep. CS 12621 - GS 1968)
3. Kalām, wooden mosque. Pillar.  
(Neg. no. Dep. CS 5268/2 - FB 1968)
4. Bahrain, wooden mosque. Doorway.  
(Neg. no. Dep. L 36/8a - US 1959)
5. Utrōt, wooden mosque. Column.  
(Neg. no. Dep. CS 12623 - GS 1968)

#### Pl. 26

1. Jaba, wooden mosque. N-S section. (RP 1980)
2. Jaba, wooden mosque. Verandah.  
(Neg. no. Dep. CS 13839/19 - US 1980)

3. Jaba, wooden mosque. View from the S. (RP 1980)
4. Jaba, wooden mosque. Detail of the decoration of the wooden railing of the ablution basins. (Neg. no. Dep. CS 13840/31a - US 1980)
5. Jaba, wooden mosque. Angular pillar of the verandah. (Neg. no. Dep. CS 13839/11 - US 1980)
6. Jaba, wooden mosque. Plan. (RP 1980)
7. Jaba, wooden mosque. Access gate into the *sahn*. (Neg. no. Dep. CS 13840/22a - US 1980)
8. Jaba, wooden mosque. Pillar of the verandah. (Neg. no. Dep. CS 13839/9 - US 1980)
9. Jaba, wooden mosque. Wooden *mibrābs*; (left) in the verandah and (right) in the winter-hall. (RP 1980)

Pl. 27

1. Sketched map of the Swāt Valley with charting of the wooden mosque. (LM 1981)
2. Dūrushkhēla, wooden mosque. Plan. (LM 1970)
3. Bar Lāikōṭ, wooden mosque. Plan. (NO 1981)
4. Kalām, wooden mosque. Doorway. (LM 1970)
5. Bahrain, wooden mosque. Pillar. (LM 1970)
6. Khwāzakhēla, wooden mosque. Front of the entrance porch to the winter mosque. (LM 1970)



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c. Historic period: inhabited sites and Buddhist sacred areas (pls. 14-24)

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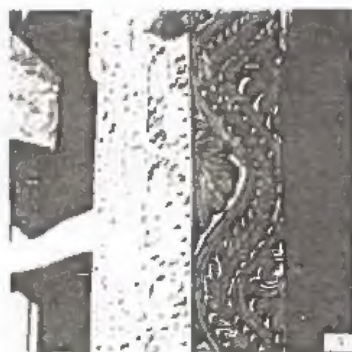
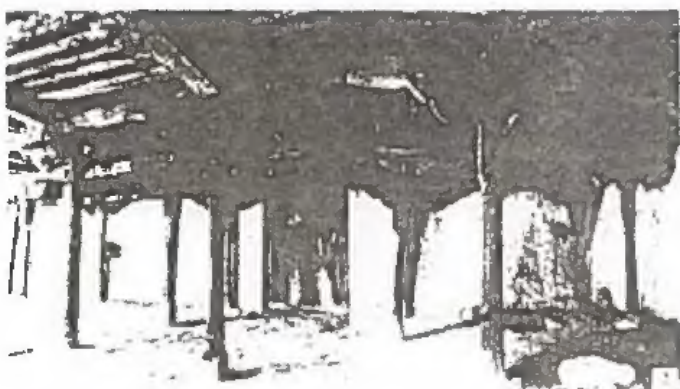
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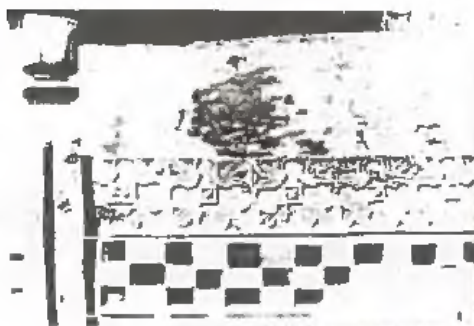
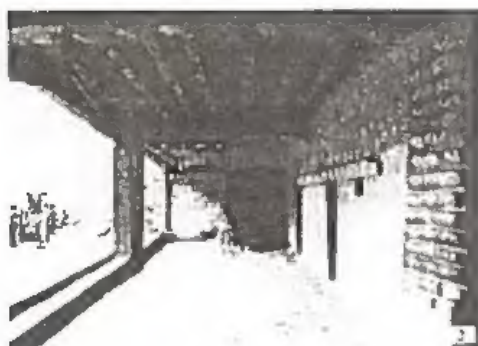


# 25 SWAT. Wooden Mosques (18th - 20th A.D.)





## 26 SWAT . Wooden Mosques (18th - 20th A.D.)



# 27 SWAT. Wooden Mosques (15th-20th A.D.)

